

Message Text

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PAGE 01 HAVANA 00578 01 OF 02 032349Z
ACTION SS-25

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O R 031932Z MAR 78
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1308
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 HAVANA 0578

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV PBOR MILI ET SO CU
SUBJ: CASTRO AIDES DISCUSS ETHIOPIA CRISIS

REF: A. HAVANA 462 B. HAVANA 516

1. SUMMARY: SENIOR CASTRO AIDES, IN CONVERSATIONS WITH
USINT OFFICER, MARCH 2 FOCUSED ON DOMESTIC WEAKNESS OF SIAD BARRE
GOVERNMENT, IMPLYING THAT SIAD MUST CALL OFF HIS ADVENTURE OR
RISK BEING OVERTHROWN. ONLY NON-MILITARY OUTCOME TO CRISIS
MENTIONED WAS CEASEFIRE COUPLED WITH POSSIBLY EXTENDED SOMALI
WITHDRAWAL. CUBANS STATED THAT GESTURES TO SOMALIS ON OGADEN
AUTONOMY OR SOVIET-UCBAN WITHDRAWAL ARE NOW IMPOSSIBLE BEFORE
SOMALI PULLBACK ACROSS BORDER AND COMMITMENT BY MOGADISCIO
NOT TO UNDERTAKE INCURSIONS INTO ETHIOPIA. END SUMMARY.

2. ACTIN USINT CHIEF, AT FIDEL CASTRO RECEPTION FOR
CALIFORNIA BUSINESS EXECUTIVES, MARCH 2, HAD OPPORTUNITY
TO DISCUSS ETHIOPIA WITH CASTRO (POLITICAL ASSISTANT)
OSMANY CIENFUEGOS, SECRETARY OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF
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PAGE 02 HAVANA 00578 01 OF 02 032349Z

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, AND DR.JOSE MIYAR, FIDEL CASTRO'S
PERSONAL ASSISTANT.

3. CIENFUEGOS SAID THAT SIAD BARRE MUST BE "POLITICALLY
AND MILITARILY DEFEATED". HE ADDED THAT CUBANS HAD WARNED
SIAD NOT TO UNDERTAKE INVASION AND NOT TO STIR UP SOMALI
"CHAUVINISM", BUT "DEMAGOGIC" SOMALI LEADER HAD IGNORED

CUBAN ADVICE.

4. CIENFUEGOS CONTINUED THAT, AS RESULT OF EXTRAORDINARY SIAD MISCALCULATIONS, SOMALI LEADER HAD PLACED HIMSELF IN VERY DIFFICULT DOMESTIC SITUATION. CIENFUEGOS SAID THAT THERE ARE TWO GROUPS OF LEADERS IN MOGADISCIO (THOSE WHO SUPPORT SIAD'S EXPANSIONIST COURSE AND THOSE WHO OPPOSE IT) AND THAT HE (CIENFUEGOS) HAD HELD TALKS WITH MEMBERS OF BOTH GROUPS DURING CASTRO'S MARCH-APRIL 1977 TRIP TO AFRICA. WHEN ASKED WHO FIGURED IN ANTI-EXPANSIONIST GROUP, CIENFUEGOS MENTIONED VICE-PRESIDENT SAMANTAR. (COMMENT: JUVENTUD REBELDE, FEBRUARY 28, CARRIED AFP NAIROBI DISPATCH QUOTING SOMALI DEFECTOR THERE AS INDICATING THAT EVERYONE IN SOMALIA "FROM VICE-PRESIDENT TO MAN ON STREET" FEARS SIAD BARRE.)

5. CIENFUGOS SAID THAT SIAD EITHER HAS TO SWALLOW THE BITTER PILL OF PUBLICLY RECOGNIZING THE ERROR OF HIS WAYS (CIENFUEGOS REPEATED THAT "RECOGNITION" MUST BE PUBLIC) AND WITHDRAW HIS TROOPS FROM SOMALIA OR, IF THIS IS NOT DONE, SOMALI MILITARY AND POLITICAL FIGURES WILL TURN AGAINST HIM. (FYI MIYAR, TAKING SAME LINE SEPARATELY, SAID THAT, BECAUSE OF PREVIOUS CUBAN TRAINING OF SOMALI ARMED FORCES, CUBANS KNOW SOMALI ARMY DOWN TO EACH AND EVERY UNIT, INCLUDING MANY OFFICERS. MIYAR FOLLOWED THIS STATEMENT BY CRYPTIC REMARK THAT US CAN BE ASSURED THAT ETHIOPIAN CRISIS WILL BE ENDED SHORTLY - PERHAPS WITHIN

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PAGE 03 HAVANA 00578 01 OF 02 032349Z

TWO MONTHS. END FYI) (COMMENT: WHETHER AS HOPE OR AS ANTICIPATED DEVELOPMENT, CUBANS GAVE STRONG IMPRESSION THAT THEY SEE OVERTHROW OF SIAD BARRE AS BOTH DESIRABLE AND LIKELY.)

6. MIYAR, POINTING TO HOPELESSNESS OF SIAD'S POSITION, ADDED THAT UNITED STATES AND EVEN CONSERVATIVE ARAB REGIMES HAVE LINKED THE POSSIBILITY OF PROVIDING MAJOR SUPPORT TO SOMALI TO A CROSSING OF SOMALI BORDER. SINCE BORDER CROSSING WILL ABSOLUTELY NOT OCCUR, MIYAR SAID, SAID HAS NO POSSIBILITY TO RECOUP HIS PRESENT AND FUTURE LOSSES.

7. WHEN ASKED WHETHER THERE IS NOT NON-MILITARY SOLUTION TO SOMALI WITHDRAWAL PROBLEM, CIENFUEGOS SAID THAT ONLY FEASIBLE FORMULA WOULD BE CEASEFIRE LINKED WITH SOMALI TROOP WITHDRAWAL. (MIYAR MADE SIMILAR STATEMENT SEPARATELY, ADDING THAT WITHDRAWAL WOULD HAVE TO INCLUDE PUBLIC AFFIRMATION THAT SOMALI ARMY IS BEING WITHDRAWN. IN THIS CONNECTION, HE PRAISED PRESIDENT CARTER'S NATIONAL PRESS CLUB OBSERVATION THAT SOMALI TROOPS ARE IN ETHIOPIA. HE ALSO SAID THAT WITHDRAWAL COULD TAKE PLACE OVER SOME DEFINITE TIME PERIOD. HE DID NOT, HOWEVER, SPELL OUT ANY PHASED WITHDRAWAL SCENARIO.)

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 HAVANA 0578

EXDIS

8. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION AS TO WHETHER SOMALI WITHDRAWAL COULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY GESTURE ON OGADEN AUTONOMY OR SOVIET-CUBAN WITHDRAWAL, CIENFUEGOS SAID THESE IDEAS ARE "FOUR MONTHS LATE". HE ADDED THAT PROBLEM OF OGADEN WITHDRAWAL IS NOW MILITARY, NOT POLITICAL, PROBLEM. NO POLITICAL GESTURES WILL BE POSSIBLE UNTIL SOMALIS ARE REMOVED FROM ETHIOPIA AND THEY COMMIT THEMSELVES NOT TO VIOLATE ETHIOPIAN FRONTIER OR UNDERTAKE SUBVERSION AGAINST ETHIOPIA. (COMMENT: CIENFUEGOS CHARACTERIZED SOVIET-CUBAN TROOP DRAWDOWN AS POLITICAL GESTURE.) IF SOMALIS ARE REMOVED BUT POLICY OF TENSIONS AND INCURSIONS CONTINUE, CIENFUEGOS SAID, THIS WOULD CONSTITUTE "NEW STORY" WHICH COULD UNRAVEL POSSIBILITY, WHICH DOES EXIST, FOR POST-SOMALI WITHDRAWAL POLITICAL GESTURES. (MIYAR SEPARATELY, IN REFERENCE TO POSSIBILITY OF CUBAN TROOP WITHDRAWAL, VOLUNTEERED THAT ETHIOPIA IS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT SITUATION FROM ANGOLA, WHERE LARGE NUMBER OF CUBAN TROOPS HAVE LONG REMAINED. ETHIOPIA, HE SAID, HAS LARGE POPULATION, TRAINED ARMY, A FIGHTING TRADITION, AND EXTENSIVE WEAPONS DELIVERED - CONDITIONS WHICH DO NOT
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PAGE 02 HAVANA 00578 02 OF 02 032350Z

OBTAIN IN ANGOLA, HE SAID).

9. IN REPLY TO QUESTION AS TO WHEN MAJOR COUNTEROFFENSIVE WILL OCCUR WHICH WILL DEPRIVE SOMALIS OF VOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL OPTION, CIENFUEGOS SAID THAT COUNTEROFFENSIVE WILL NOT DEVELOP IN ONE MASSIVE THRUST, BUT RATHER WILL PROCEED IN STAGES. THEREFORE, PRESSURE WILL DEVELOP OVER COURSE OF SEVERAL WEEKS IN WHICH THERE WILL BE OPPORTUNITY FOR SOMALIS TO WORK OUT VOLUNTARY FORCE WITHDRAWAL, IF THEY SO CHOOSE.

10. WHEN ASKED WHETHER COUNTEROFFENSIVE TOWARD BORDER MIGHT NOT LEAD TO MISUNDERSTANDINGS ON PART OF WESTERN AND MIDDLE EAST STATES, CIENFUEGOS SAID THAT CUBANS EXPECT THAT SIAD WILL SEEK TO PLAY "INVASION THREAT" CARD AND, INDEED, THERE MIGHT BE PERIOD OF "CONFUSION" LASTING THREE TO FOUR DAYS IN WHICH INTENTIONS OF ATTACKING FORCES MIGHT APPEAR UNCLEAR. CIENFUEGOS REITERATED (LIKE MIYAR - PARA 6) THAT THERE WILL ABSOLUTELY BE NO VIOLATION OF SOMALI BORDER - A STATEMENT WHICH, HE SAID, ALSO EXTENDS TO AIRCRAFT. HE SAID THAT, IF PERIOD OF "CONFUSION" APPEARS AT HAND, CUBANS MIGHT SEEK TO COMMUNICATE INTENTIONS CLEARLY TO CONCERNED NATIONS.

11. TURING BRIEFLY TO ERITREA, CIENFUEGOS, WITHOUT SPECIFICALLY SAYING THAT CUBANS WOULD NOT INTERVENE (AS DID GOC VICE-PRESIDENT CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ, FEBRUARY 17 - SEE HAVANA 462), STATED THAT THERE CAN BE POLITICAL SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM. SUCH A POLITICAL SOLUTION - WHICH WOULD HAVE TO EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY OF INDEPENDENCE BECAUSE OF THE ETHIOPIAN SEA ACCESS PROBLEM - WOULD BE BOTH A VALUABLE INTERNATIONAL GESTURE TO THE ARABS AND A JUST RESPONSE TO LOCAL POPULACE'S ASPIRATIONS, CIENFUEGOS SAID. BUT A POLITICAL INITIATIVE ON ERITREA, CIENFUEGOS
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PAGE 03 HAVANA 00578 02 OF 02 032350Z

CONTINUED, WILL PROBABLY HAVE TO AWAIT CONCLUSION OF THE OGADEN EPISODE.

12. COMMENT: CUBANS GIVE EVERY EVIDENCE THAT THEY FEEL THEY ARE IN DOMINANT POSITION AND THAT ETHIOPIAN CRISIS WILL BE RESOLVED ON THEIR TERMS IN NOT TOO DISTANT TIME FRAME. IF CIENFUEGOS AND MIYAR ARE FULLY CANDID, WHICH IS UNCERTAIN, CUBAN STRATEGY IN COMING WEEKS MAY BE TO LAUNCH A SERIES OF LIMITED OBJECTIVE ATTACKS WHICH WILL PROGRESSIVELY ESCALATE PRESSURES ON SIAD, WITHOUT HUMILIATING SOMALI ARMED FORCES OR RUNNING RISK OF MAJOR WESTERN/MIDDLE EAST INTERVENTION. CUBANS GIVE EVERY INDICATION THAT THEY CONSIDER THAT SIAD WILL LIKELY FALL AS RESULT OF THIS EFFORT. IF THIS DOES NOT OCCUR, PRESUMABLY THREE OR FOUR

DAY COUP DE GRACE POSITED BY CIENFUEGOS MIGHT
BE LAUNCHED AGAINST REMAINING SOMALI FORCES IN ETHIOPIA.

13. NEITHER MIYAR NOR CIENFUEGOS APPEARED TO FEEL
THAT ETHIOPIAN PROBLEM WOULD REPRESENT LONG-LASTING BURDEN
ON US-CUBAN RELATIONS - INDEED, BOTH OF THEM - WHO WERE AWARE OF
PRESIDENT CARTER'S RECENT STATEMENTS - REFERRED SURPRISINGLY
POSITIVELY TO CURRENT US POLICY ON HORN. END COMMENT.
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